



Minority Staff  
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Unemployment Analysis | Prepared for Rep. Tom Allen

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## Almost Two Thousand Jobless Workers in Maine Lost Unemployment Benefits on December 28

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As the economy stagnates, the job growth that characterized the economy in the 1990s has been replaced by significant job losses. Since January 2000, the economy has lost almost 1.5 million jobs. Nationally, the unemployment rate reached an eight-year high of 6.0% in November 2002.

Traditionally, the federal-state unemployment insurance program provides a safety net for unemployed workers during economic downturns. Congress, however, failed to extend unemployment benefits before adjourning in November, forcing a cut-off in benefits for hundreds of thousands of families on December 28, 2002.

At the request of Rep. Tom Allen, this analysis examines the impact of the loss of unemployment insurance benefits in Maine. It finds that 1,800 workers in the state lost their unemployment benefits on December 28.

### Background

The federal-state unemployment insurance program is designed to provide benefits to eligible workers who are unemployed. In most states, benefits are paid for a maximum of 26 weeks. However, during economic recessions or periods of high unemployment, the federal government will often temporarily extend unemployment benefits to ensure that workers who are unable to find a job do not lose all benefits.

In March 2002, in response to the ongoing economic slowdown, Congress passed and President Bush signed the Temporary Extended Unemployment Compensation Act of 2002 (TEUC). The legislation gave unemployed workers an additional 13 to 26 weeks of 100% federally financed unemployment benefits for workers in states that have been hit hard by the economic downturn. This extension was designed to help working Americans who were unemployed and unable to find a job. Moreover, because benefits go to workers who are likely to spend them quickly, the benefits were intended to provide a broad and rapid stimulus for the economy as a whole.

Since Congress failed to act before adjourning in November, benefits in the TEUC program ended on December 28. Because the unemployment rate continues to increase and the number of long-term unemployed workers remains at high levels, the Senate in November passed bipartisan legislation extending unemployment benefits for an additional three months. The Republican-controlled House, however, refused to take up this bipartisan legislation before the end of the session.<sup>1</sup> President Bush did not call for an extension of benefits until December 15, 2002, weeks after Congress had adjourned.<sup>2</sup>

Congress' failure to pass legislation to help unemployed Americans means that the benefits of hundreds of thousands of Americans are at risk. Presently, 780,000 unemployed workers lost all unemployment benefits on December 28.<sup>3</sup> After December 28, an estimated 96,300 workers per week lost benefits.<sup>4</sup>

### The Impact of the Expiration of Unemployment Insurance in Maine

This analysis, conducted at the request of Rep. Thomas H. Allen, estimates the impact of this cutoff of federal unemployment benefits in Maine. It is based upon statewide data on the number of unemployed workers, the number of those workers who lost benefits, and the size of the benefits they lost.

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that there are 25,800 unemployed workers in Maine.<sup>5</sup> Statewide, there are 12,177 individuals receiving unemployment insurance in Maine.<sup>6</sup> The average unemployment insurance benefit in the state is \$228.61 per week.<sup>7</sup>

The date on which unemployed workers lose their unemployment benefits depends on how long the workers have been out of work. Statewide, analysts have found that an estimated 1,800 unemployed workers in the state will be cut off from benefits on December 28.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, analysts estimate that an additional 2,600 workers in Maine will lose their unemployment benefits between December 28, 2002 and March 31, 2003 if Congress does not renew the benefits.<sup>9</sup>

If all 4,400 of these Maine workers lose 13 weeks of benefits, a total of over \$13 million in unemployment benefits will not be received by workers in the state.

## Endnotes

1. Instead, on the last day of legislative business, the House passed limited legislation that would have provided significantly fewer benefits than the bipartisan Senate proposal. This legislation provided benefits for only a short period for a limited pool of workers. The legislation would have provided only five additional weeks of benefits for workers who exhausted regular unemployment benefits before December 28. For workers exhausting regular unemployment benefits after December 28, the House bill would have provided benefits in only three states, Alaska, Oregon, and Washington. See Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *New House Unemployment Proposal is Extraordinarily Limited* (Nov. 14, 2002).
2. *Bush Calls for Extending Jobless Benefits*, Washington Post (Dec. 15, 2002).
3. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Temporary Unemployment Benefits Should Be Extended In All States and Strengthened* (Dec. 19, 2002).
4. *Id.*
5. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Civilian Labor Force and Unemployment by State and Metro Area* (December 2002) (online at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/metro.t01.htm>).
6. Department of Labor, *Unemployment Insurance Weekly Claims Report* (Dec. 12, 2002) (online at <http://ows.doleta.gov/unemploy/page8/121202.html>).
7. Department of Labor, *Summary Data for State Programs, by State, Report Period Between 10/1/02 and 10/31/02* (December 2002) (online at <http://www.ows.doleta.gov/unemploy/txtdocs/sumoct02.html>).
8. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *supra* note 3.
9. Based on estimates that, between December 28, 2002 and March 31, 2003, 200 workers in Maine will lose benefits each week. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *supra* note 3.